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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 003329

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#) [RU](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND TALABANI DISCUSS DEFUSING FLAG
ISSUE, PKK

REF: BAGHDAD 3260

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: In meetings with President Jalal Talabani on September 5-6, the Ambassador expressed his disappointment with the timing of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Masud Barzani's September 1 statement on using the 1958 Iraqi flag within the KRG until a new flag had been determined by the Council of Representatives (CoR). The Ambassador noted that after a telephone conversation on September 5, Barzani had agreed to remove the controversial clause from the KRG decree (see paragraph 5 below for the full text of the decree). Talabani agreed that Barzani's act was a mistake, but blamed it on the poor counsel of his pro-nationalist advisors: pro-nationalist advisors: his son Masrur Barzani and former Ambassador Peter Galbraith. Talabani then updated the Ambassador on the latest developments with the PKK, discussed preparations for the upcoming UNGA trip, the potential for signing a Status of Forces Agreement between Iraq and the U.S., and briefly mentioned his talks with the Arab League regarding Syria's interference in Iraq. END SUMMARY.

Moving to Resolve the Flag Dispute

12. (C) In meetings with President Jalal Talabani on September 5-6, the Ambassador noted the negative attention surrounding Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Masud Barzani's September 1 statement declaring that the KRG would fly the 1958 flag - vice the current Iraqi flag - in the Kurdistan Region until such time as a new Iraqi flag has been determined (see draft of KRG decree in paragraph 5 below). During the meeting on September 5, the Ambassador stated that one of the major problems stemmed from the fact that the KRG action was taken unilaterally, without consultation with the national Council of Representatives (CoR). The situation is escalating, with some political groups making use of the current situation to put the U.S. government in a difficult position, vis--vis the Kurds. This did not mitigate, however, that through his actions Barzani has not only put himself, but also the Ambassador, Talabani, and Prime Minister Maliki in a very difficult bind. Maliki has been forced to reply publicly to what is widely perceived to be a challenge to central authority by the KRG, and is feeling pressure to stand his ground. In a meeting with Maliki on September 5, the Ambassador informed Talabani, Maliki dismissed the idea of banning the current Iraqi flag "since it was not the flag that killed anyone." Barzani's actions, the Ambassador pointed out, made altering the flag more difficult than it needed to be.

¶3. (C) On September 6, the Ambassador informed Talabani that Barzani had agreed to drop the controversial clause on the 1958 flag from the KRG decree. In addition, Barzani said he would send a letter of clarification to speaker Mashhadani and other Iraqi leaders. The statement will emphasize KRG commitment to Iraqi unity and to the constitutional process. The Ambassador also noted that it would be a good gesture to issue a statement after the Policy Committee on National Security (PCNS) meeting on September 7 to close out the issue.

¶4. (C) Talabani responded that Barzani's statement was unreasonable, wrong, and a mistake - but it was done. Now, the focus needed to be on repairing the damage. Barzani, he confided, is surrounded by two extremists: former Ambassador and current consultant to the Barzanis Peter Galbraith, and his son Masrur Barzani. Galbraith, Talabani stated, is always inciting Barzani toward independence, while Masrur Barzani is very nationalistic. Talabani added that Barzani's son Masrur is very nationalistic. Talabani said he would mobilize the executive branch of the government to ask the CoR to quickly approve a new Iraqi flag, which would resolve this conflict. As for Maliki's statement that it was not the flag that harmed anyone, Talabani pointed out that Maliki had been a member of the 2003 Governing Council that had voted to replace the current Iraqi flag with one that was more acceptable to all Iraqis. On September 6, Talabani informed the Ambassador that he had instructed the Kurdistan Alliance bloc in the CoR to raise the issue of redesigning the flag. (NOTE: The Kurdistan Alliance did raise the flag issue in the CoR on September 6, calling for a redesign. END NOTE)

¶5. (U) Begin Text:

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Pursuant to the powers granted by the Regional Presidency Law No. (1) of 2005, which was abrogated by Law No. (2) of 2006, we decided the following:

The Flag of Kurdistan shall only be raised at the sites listed below:

- ¶1. All government departments and agencies in the Region of Kurdistan
- ¶2. All army headquarters of Kurdistan
- ¶3. All government checkpoints in the Region of Kurdistan
- ¶4. Political parties can raise their party flags at their party headquarters alongside the flag of Kurdistan
- ¶5. On all official occasions that require raising the Iraqi flag, the flag of the revolution of July 14, 1958 shall be raised until another flag for the Federal State of Iraq is determined in accordance with the Constitution.

This document was written in Hawlair (Irbil) on July 4, 2006.

//signed//
Masoud Barzani
President of the Kurdistan Region - Iraq

Turkey Allows Visit to Ocalan

¶6. (C) Talabani reported that the Democratic Society Party (DTP) - the only legal Kurdish political party in Turkey - in agreement with Turkish military intelligence arranged for one of jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan's lawyers, Ibrahim Yelmas, to see Ocalan in prison. According to Yelmas, Talabani said, Ocalan supported the ceasefire and directed Yelmas to direct the PKK forces in northern Iraq to lay down their arms. Talabani anticipated that a public announcement that the PKK will observe a unilateral, indefinite ceasefire would be made on September 6 or 7.

Preparation for UNGA

17. (C) While discussing logistics for Talabani's upcoming trip to New York for the United Nations General Assembly meeting, the Ambassador suggested that it would be helpful if during the next Policy Committee for National Security (PCNS) meeting Talabani, Vice-President Adil Abd al-Mahdi, and Vice-President Tarik al-Hashimi would identify key outstanding issues and a timetable for resolving them. (NOTE: The next PCNS meeting is scheduled for September 7. END NOTE) For instance, the Ambassador noted, Constitutional review could be one such item. The American people needed to see that Iraqi leaders were grappling with the difficult issues and had come to terms on how to resolve them, the Ambassador explained. Talabani promised that he would do so, and stated that he also planned to publish some articles detailing Iraq's progress on these matters in major international media outlets.

SOFA, Arab League Issues

18. (C) The Ambassador remarked that during a recent visit to Washington, Abd al-Mahdi reportedly told Washington that France and Russia might veto a renewal of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) to extend MNF-I's mandate in Iraq. The Ambassador noted that he was not sure where Abd al-Mahdi got this impression. Talabani stated that he also was not sure why Abd al-Mahdi had raised this issue, but that he personally had called the Russians to ask for their support on the UNSCR renewal. According to Talabani, he sent one of his legal advisors, Jalal Mashda, with a letter to Russian President Putin, to be delivered during the Group of 8 summit in St. Petersburg. Talabani reported that Putin had replied that, while Moscow had its differences with Washington, he understood that Iraq needed MNF-I's support at this time. Talabani claimed that Putin had promised to send Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to speak with the Iraqi Ambassador to the United Nations. In addition, Talabani stated that he would travel to France prior to the December 2006 vote on the UNSCR to lobby for France's support.

19. (C) Finally, Talabani mentioned in passing that he had spoken with Arab League Ambassador to Baghdad Moktar Lamani to protest Syrian interference in Iraq. (NOTE: Talabani was probably referring to ongoing accusations that Syria is

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either facilitating or turning a blind eye to foreign terrorists crossing into Iraq from the Syrian border. END NOTE) According to Talabani, Lamani agreed with his position and sent a letter to Arab League Secretary General Amre Moussa, who in turn summoned the Syrian Ambassador to the Arab League for an explanation of Damascus' behavior. KHALILZAD